

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
Marine Corps University  
*User's Guide to Marine Corps Values*

**DISCUSSION LEADING TECHNIQUES**

1. Introduction. During any period of instruction, it is important that you, as the instructor, gain the attention of your students and provide a sense of enthusiasm and a desire to learn. If you use slides or other media, describe how this media will help to gain student's attention. Use an attention gainer that is related to your class. Once you have gained their attention you must sell your lesson. Tell your students why it is important for them to listen to your lesson. The instructor must impress upon the students their need to know the material. If the instructor can generate in each student a sense of personal involvement with the material, mastery of the subject matter will be made easier. Generate interest in your group by being enthusiastic about your topic. This will stimulate and motivate the students.

2. Overview. The purpose of this instruction is to explain how to lead a guided discussion.

3. References. Not applicable.

4. Discussion Leader Notes. Not applicable.

5. Discussion

a. Know when to use a guided discussion as stated in this lecture.

b. Know the advantages and disadvantages of using the guided discussion as a training technique.

c. Know the tasks of the discussion leader prior to and during the discussion.

6. Methods/Media. The following points outline how to conduct a guided discussion:

a. What is a guided discussion? To have a guided discussion you need:

(1) A leader. This person controls the discussion and makes sure all group members become active Participants.

(2) A desired outcome or goal. This can be a solution to a problem, covering a topic, or something else.

(3) A structure. Certain points need to be covered. Sometimes they need to be covered in a certain order or sequence. The leader controls the structure.

b. When do you use a guided discussion?

(1) If you are instructing a small group (up to 20) all at once, you can use guided discussions often. Sometimes guided discussions take more preparation, patience, and mental quickness on your part than other kinds of instruction. But it can make your job of teaching much easier. Below are some steps to follow to make sure your Marines learn. Guided Discussions help you do every one of them and all at the same time.

(a) Allow practice. Practice may be the most important part of learning. In guided discussions, the members are always practicing by repeating and thinking about what they know and learning from experiences of others.

(b) Determine Marine's strengths and weaknesses. When you conduct good guided discussions, you know whether your Marines are studying and whether they know what they are supposed to know; and you know it now!

(c) Involve all discussion group members actively. In guided discussions, everyone participates and that means more than saying "Yes" or "No," or agreeing or disagreeing.

(d) Motivate your Marines. Part of being motivated is feeling part of the situation. When your group members participate, the instruction relates to them. It is automatically part of their life.

(2) The principal two factors you face in conducting guided discussions are time and group size. It usually takes longer to conduct a discussion of a subject than to lecture about it. Also, guided discussions work best with small groups.

(3) When should you choose guided discussions? Consider this example: Imagine if you were assigned to give a class on "Survival at Sea" and your student group included members of a Marine amphibious assault team, a Navy submarine crew member, and a Navy fighter pilot. All these individuals are concerned with survival in the ocean because they deploy aboard ships. How

would you train them? It depends on the purpose of the instruction.

(a) Example 1: If the purpose of the instruction is simply to identify and describe essential survival items, a lecture and demonstration of the articles might be sufficient.

(b) Example 2: If the purpose is to have the feeling of being on a raft for two days, then experience might be best.

(c) Example 3: If the purpose is to discuss the mental preparation for coping with different situations, the guided discussion might be best.

(4) In each of the examples, we used the word might. That's because there is another thing you need to think about. Guided discussions are dependent on the group members. What experiences do the members bring to the group? In the previous example, the members could probably go on talking forever. They have experiences similar to the topic, like living in the water, being alone, and so on. But what if the group were made up of recruits? Perhaps a lecture would be better because this group may have little or no experience on the subject.

(5) Some groups will "teach" themselves; others may have very little to say; still other groups may require a mixture of discussion and lecture by the discussion leader, though the lecture would be disguised as simply input from the discussion leader. As a resource person, the discussion leader must be prepared to stimulate discussion, to provide direction, and to get the most out of the time being spent. Without the discussion leader's expertise and guidance, a group can flounder and end up in just another bull session.

c. What are the advantages of guided discussions?

(1) Groups usually have more resources than individuals. Varying backgrounds and experiences, ensure new or different approaches.

(2) Group members are motivated by the presence of others. It's natural that a Marine wants to look good in front of a group. A desire to impress the group motivates each group member.

(3) Group members may feel a stronger commitment and esprit de corps. When your Marines solve their own problems or contribute to the unit's success, they tend to be more motivated to accomplish the tasks.

(4) Participation leads to increased understanding. New ideas, thoughts, opinions, or approaches will increase each Marine's knowledge and skill level. Informed Marines do better than those wearing blinders.

(5) Members acquire or improve communication skills useful in other situations. By discussing any issue, problems, requirements, or plan, you gain more information, new insights and knowledge, and an increased ability to analyze the situation and formulate a course of action.

(6) Members teach each other by discussing their experiences. The real learning experience comes from listening and participating as a group member.

d. What are the disadvantages of guided discussions?

(1) More time consuming than other methods. Any time you open a subject up for discussion by your Marines it will take time.

(2) Discussion can suppress convictions. If you express your feelings on a subject first and then ask subordinates to give their opinions or views, you will probably get your opinions and views right back. The leaders' opinions and group pressure may suppress opinions.

(3) Discussion may substitute talk for action. Talking about "How to solve a problem" is not enough. You must be prepared to take action based on the group's impact. Don't say you will do something or change something unless you truly can. Marines want action, not talk.

e. Tasks of the Discussion Leader prior to the discussion.

(1) Select appropriate subject. Commanders select subjects to be taught based on the needs of their Marines, such as discipline, ethics, why the 292 antenna was put up wrong, why the maintenance on the MRC110 is unsat. The subject can be selected in advance or on the spot.

(2) Select appropriate training objectives. Decide what there is about the subject you want your Marines to master.

(3) Acquire knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. General D.M. Shoup, 22nd Commandant of the Marine Corps, stated: "To lack intelligence is to be in the ring blindfolded." It is tough to guide a discussion if you do not have a basic understanding of the facts relating to the topic. As the discussion leader, the learning experiences end result is dependent upon your knowledge and skill. If the group cannot answer a question you must be able to do so or to find the answer.

(4) Research backgrounds of group members. Basically, this means know your Marines. Another point to consider is that, based on experiences and assignments, certain Marines will be more knowledgeable on certain aspects of your subject than others. If you learn about your Marines' backgrounds, you may be able to get slow starters involved by relating questions to their personal experiences. For example, what elements of military strategy, like weather, terrain, and so on, are also factors in other aspects of life? When you think about your group, also think about their personalities and how well they express themselves verbally.

(5) Prepare a discussion leader's outline.

(a) This is simply a working guide with built-in flexibility. List your purpose, learning objectives, possible questions, and a direction. Mental outlines can work but writing your thoughts down will help you keep your thoughts straight. Annex B is a sample discussion leader's outline.

(b) Along with each point you intend to cover, write down how you intend to cover it. Are there some points you can cover best by using a slide presentation? Showing a short film? Will you need to hand out written materials? Have the group members refer to a text? Will you summarize or write main points on a transparency? On the chalkboard? How about a sand table or just a diagram drawn in the dirt? Consider every part of your discussion beforehand. The use of questions as a means of directing and stimulating discussion is one of the most effective techniques used by the discussion leader.

(c) You also need to decide how long to spend on each point. Allow enough time for yourself and for the members to talk. It is important to let the group express themselves,

and this often takes not only time but patience. Also allow time for prompting individuals or for helping them if they start stumbling. Your assistant discussion leader can usually assist you in "watching" the time schedule.

(6) Prepare extra material. Parts of discussions often go quicker than expected. When this happens, you'll need to expand other parts of the discussion. If you have a lively group, space can be filled simply by allowing more discussion. But you will also want to have extra material ready. For example, if you have one case study planned, have one in reserve too. Also, there is usually at least one point in any topic that "you wish there was more time to go into." Be ready. You may have the time!

(7) Check materials and facilities to be used.

(a) If in a classroom, check lighting, seats and equipment. If in the field, check for poison ivy, snakes, and security. For a balanced discussion, you'll find that a balanced seating arrangement will be necessary. Some individuals will be quick in their delivery; others, slow and deliberate. Some will speak a lot; others, only when prompted. To create a balance, spread these different types evenly throughout the group. Sometimes even the most passive people will become active when caught in a crossfire of discussion.

(b) Before you begin the discussion, set up any equipment or aids you plan to use. Also, arrange the seating. Round tables are preferable, but often not available. So you will probably need to place desks in a circle or elliptical arrangement. The ellipse is probably best if you have a slide or film presentation within the discussion. In the field just have your Marines find a nice "soft piece of terrain" to sit on.

(c) When preparing and leading discussions, it is desirable to have an assistant if possible. This individual could be your XO, SNCO, or anyone you choose. The assistant discussion leader can help guide the discussion, operate training aids, or give summaries--anything you direct.

f. Tasks of the Discussion Leader during the discussion.

(1) Set the stage. Tell your Marines what you are going to discuss. State the purpose of the discussion the objective and the major points to be covered. Also explain any media that will be used and any instructions you want understood before you start.

Example: "Today we'll be talking about the importance of being a leader. Based on the handouts I gave you and on any personal experience you may have, we will first look at people we might call leaders. And some we might not call leaders. Then we will try to pick out characteristics, or traits, that make these individuals leaders. We will also try and define leadership. Finally, we will see a film of four people talking or working with others. After the film we will decide whether or not they are leaders based on our definition."

(2) Start the discussion.

(a) A transition statement is a good way to get started on the move from one point to the next. Your transitions will usually be a question, or end in a question.

Examples: "Who can start by describing a person they think is a leader?" (If no one responds, you might consider calling on one of the more confident looking members.)

"Lt. Smith, could you start by describing a person you think is a leader?"

or

"Let's start by describing someone and see if we think he's a leader." (Then you mention someone to get the discussion going.)

(b) In a guided discussion, you have the added advantage of being able to use the students' words as transitions. For example, after the introduction, a Marine might ask, "When you say leader, do you mean someone who's in a leadership billet?" You could say, "That's a good question. Have all the Marines you have known in leadership billets been leaders?"

(c) Other ideas are to show a film or use a case study to get them involved.

(d) Remember, the way you start the discussion is key to its success. Ensure you create a relaxed atmosphere and obtain their trust at the beginning.

(3) Control the flow of discussion.

(a) The term discussion leader implies the leader has a predetermined plan and guides the discussion towards the

objective. It is your duty as the discussion leader to keep your Marines on the subject.

(b) Sometimes you may have to cut off discussion of a particular point to keep the discussion moving ahead. Here the trick is not to interrupt too much. Do this by waiting for an individual to reach the end of his thought. Then use positive statements to cut off the discussion.

Examples: "That's an interesting point. I'd like to come back to that later if there's time."

"That's exactly what we want to get at. Now, Captain Jones has proposed two characteristics of leaders; sincerity and perseverance. Can anyone think of others? How about the leadership traits? What do you think Lieutenant Walker?"

In both cases, you have taken back control. Also, in the second case, you are politely telling Captain Jones, "That's enough on that part of the discussion."

#### (4) Control group participation.

(a) In a group discussion everyone should be involved and be adding to the discussion. It is your job to control the over-talkative Marine and involve the quiet ones. The proper use of questions will help the discussion leader control participation. There are three types of questions available to the discussion leader. Two types, Direct and Overhead, can be done in advance and incorporated into the discussion leader outline. The third, Redirect, is a spontaneous type question.

[1] Direct. Can be used to involve the Marines who are not taking part. Such as: "LCpl Brown, why do you think a leader must set the example?"

[2] Overhead. Used to address the entire group. Such as: "Can someone give us an example of courage?"

[3] Redirect. A question directed at the discussion leader but returned to the group as an overhead question, or to an individual as a direct question. Such as, if you are asked to state the most important leadership trait by a participant, rather than answer the question yourself you say, "That's a very good question, let's discuss it. Is there one



trait that is most important?" (overhead question-redirecting original question).

(b) You want everyone to talk. But you don't want any one person to talk too much. To get quiet individuals to say more than "Yes" or "No", ask questions that require responses of more than one word. Be careful not to intimidate this kind of person, though. Start him/her off with easy questions that require short answers and progress during the discussion to questions that require longer answers. For example, go from "Which of the qualities of leadership do you think are most important?" (which requires a single word responses to "Here's a leader. What makes her a leader?" (which requires a much longer explanation). Remember: The question often determines how long the response will be.

(c) Watch group members' "body language" for tell-tale signs of agreement and disagreement. By watching them you can better determine who to ask what question to or who to voice an opinion on someone else's response.

(5) Interject appropriate material from prior discussions. Points made in previous leadership training which apply to the current discussion topic should be pointed out and "tied in."

(6) Accomplish the Training Objectives. The leader decides what he wants his Marines to learn and calls them training objectives. If the Marines learn, you accomplish your mission. If they don't learn it all, then you must spend more time with the discussion or reevaluate your methodology.

(7) Summarize and end the discussion.

(a) A good discussion leader will utilize, synthesize and summarize comments made by the group. Everything discussed should be periodically summarized. If possible have a chalkboard, overhead projector, or easel close at hand, write down (or have your assistant) all important points or statements as they occur; this will aid the discussion and aid in summarizing the main points later. Also, help group members shorten long answers by summarizing them, but do not change the statement's meaning.

(b) Summarize at the end of each main point. If the points have been made clear, this will usually only require your repeating those points. Again, only use the terminology supplied or agreed on by the group. Otherwise, you might be

asked questions like, "What did you say that meant?" or "That's not what we said, was it?"

(c) Finally, summarize the entire discussion. Once again, restate the objective the purpose of the discussion. This time, though, you expand the statement to include any solution or conclusion that the group has reached. For example, "So we've decided today that a person who is a leader is one who knows his job, who knows himself/herself, and who takes care of his people."

g. Common mistakes made by Discussion Leaders.

(1) Failing to be prepared. This is the most common error that discussion leaders make. They often think they can "wing it" and fail to organize, plan, and research the topic sufficiently. A leader must know his/her subject. Guiding a good discussion is not an easy task, and the quality of the learning experience is heavily dependent upon your ability to do your duty as a discussion leader.

(2) Becoming the "duty expert." This means talking too much and providing all the answers. If you want your Marines to discuss a subject, keep quiet and let them discuss it. The "duty expert" can suppress their responses and ruin the effectiveness of the group discussion. It can become a "selling of the boss's point of view" vice a group learning experience or decision process. Avoid preaching, moralizing, and lecturing.

(3) solve each other's problems or, as a team, solve their own. Sometimes the discussion leader needs to answer when you are the "duty expert," are asked for your opinion, or need to answer a question to get the discussion on track or clear up a point.

(4) Failing to use interim summaries. The purpose of any summary is to reemphasize main points already covered. If you cover more than one main point or if the discussion lasts more than an hour, the interim summary will help transition from one main point to another, plus review what has been covered.

(5) Failing to accomplish training objectives. The training objective's were your objectives because you want your Marines to learn something in particular. If your Marines do not learn, then you fail to accomplish your objective.

(6) Allowing side conversations. In any training evolution, you want the full attention of your Marines. This is

particularly true with discussion group learning situations. Side conversations are distracting to other group members and prevent the personnel involved in these side conversations from keeping up with the "actual" discussion flow. Only one person should talk at a time, after all we can only effectively listen to one at a time. Ways to regain attention are:

(a) Direct a question to one of the Marines in the side conversation, or

(b) Ask the side group to contribute their ideas to the entire group.

(7) Allowing group members to work on other material. This can have the same effect as side conversations.

(8) Allowing an argument to develop. Marines tend to get excited about some topics which can lead to arguments. Remember you are the leader. Use questions to get viewpoints of other Marines. This should stop the argument, and also get a majority viewpoint. For example: "What do you think about what Corporal Smith and Corporal Jones were talking about?"

(9) Losing track of the discussion's flow. This usually happens if the discussion leader is studying notes or the lesson outline and not listening to the discussion. The only solution is to know your subject, and pay attention at all times.

#### 7. Questions and Answers (time as required)

a. Ask for any questions from the group.

b. If the class does not ask questions ask some of your own.

#### 8. Summary

In summary remember:

a. Use the guided discussion when:

(1) The group is small.

(2) The topic lends itself to being discussed rather than demonstrated or experienced.

(3) Your Marines will be able to effectively discuss the topic.

b. The tasks of the discussion leader prior to the discussion are:

- (1) Select the subject.
- (2) Select the training objectives.
- (3) Acquire knowledge of the subject.
- (4) Research background of group members.
- (5) Prepare discussion outline.
- (6) Prepare extra material.
- (7) Check materials and facilities.

c. The tasks of the discussion leader during the discussion are:

- (1) Set the stage.
- (2) Start the discussion.
- (3) Control the flow of the discussion.
- (4) Control group participation.
- (5) Interject appropriate material from prior discussions.
- (6) Accomplish the training objectives.
- (7) Summarize and end the discussion.

d. Following your leadership discussions your Marines should leave each period with the feeling that something has been learned, reviewed, or accomplished. A key element in accomplishing this goal is the manner in which the discussion leader approaches his/her duties.

## 9. Appendices

- a. Appendix A. Discussion Techniques Outline.
- b. Appendix B. Sample Discussion Leader's Outline.
- c. Appendix C. Leadership Discussion Critique.

d. Appendix D. Discussion Techniques.

## APPENDIX A

### DISCUSSION LEADING TECHNIQUES

#### DISCUSSION TECHNIQUES OUTLINE

1. Purpose. To instruct the student on how to lead a guided discussion.

a. Know when to use a guided discussion as stated in this lecture.

b. Know the advantages and disadvantages of using the guided discussion as a training technique.

c. Know the tasks of the discussion leader prior to and during the discussion.

2. Definition of a Guided Discussion

a. A guided discussion is a training session where a designated discussion leader guides up to 20 participants in a discussion of a given subject. The discussion leader has both a predetermined plan for the overall flow of the discussion and a set of Training Objectives that he wants the group to learn.

b. A guided discussion is not:

(1) A lecture

(2) A meeting

(3) A rap session

3. Advantages/Disadvantages of a Guided Discussion

a. Advantages

(1) Groups have more resources than individuals have.

(2) Group members are normally motivated by the presence of others.

(3) Group members may feel a stronger commitment and esprit de corps when they participate in a discussion.

(4) Participation leads to increased understanding.

(5) Members acquire or improve communication skills useful in other situations.

(6) Members teach each other by discussing their experiences.

b. Disadvantages

(1) More time-consuming than other methods.

(2) Discussion can suppress convictions.

(3) Discussion may substitute talk for action.

4. Tasks of the discussion leader

a. Prior to the discussion

(1) Select appropriate subject.

(2) Select appropriate training objectives.

(3) Acquire a thorough knowledge and understanding of the subject matter.

(4) Research backgrounds of group members.

(5) Prepare a Discussion Leader's Outline.

(a) A working guide with built in flexibility.

(b) Lists purpose and training objectives.

(c) Questions to be asked or statements to be made.

(d) Aids and other supporting materials to be used.

(e) A general time plan to organize period.

(6) Prepare extra discussion material.

(7) Check the material and facilities that will be used.

b. During the discussion

(1) Set the stage.

(2) Start the discussion.

(a) Realize that the quality of the learning is heavily dependent upon him/herself.

(b) Create a relaxed atmosphere.

(c) Work hard to obtain trust from group members and establish good rapport, avoid "preaching" and "moralizing."

(3) Control the flow of the discussion.

(a) Use direct, overhead, and redirect questions to keep the discussion on track.

(b) Use a time plan to ensure required points and training objectives are covered.

(4) Control group participation.

(a) Allow others to express their opinions, but do not let any one member monopolize the discussion.

(b) Use knowledge of group members and effective use of questions to ensure all members participate.

(c) Watch the group members' "body language" for signs of agreement or disagreement and call on them as appropriate for comments.

(5) Interject appropriate material from prior discussions.

(a) Reinforce learning points by relating them to information from previous discussions.

(b) Tie the discussion into how the subject fits into the larger picture (e.g., how values affect morale, discipline, motivation, etc.).

(6) Accomplish the training objectives.

(a) Ensure the main points are clarified and understood by the group members through the "haze" of discussion.

(b) Ensure the major points are covered/emphasized.

(7) Summarize and end the discussion.



(a) Listen to what each group member has to say and try and tie their points together using interim summaries.

(b) Recognize the points on which the group agrees or disagrees.

(c) Recognize the contributions from the group members.

(d) End the discussion on a positive note.

5. Common mistakes of a Discussion Leader

a. Failing to be prepared.

b. Becoming the "duty expert."

c. Answering questions from the group.

d. Failing to use interim summaries.

e. Failing to accomplish the training objectives.

f. Allowing side conversations.

g. Allowing group members to work on other material.

h. Allowing an argument to develop.

i. Losing track of the discussion flow.

## APPENDIX B

### DISCUSSION LEADING TECHNIQUES

#### SAMPLE DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

(Note: This is a sample outline intended to serve as a general guide for the student when he/she is assigned to prepare and lead a leadership discussion. There are no charts Provided.)

TIME	SUBJECT	REMARKS
0000	1. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	
	a. I will be acting as the Discussion Leader for this Leadership Conference and will be my assistant. Our general subject for discussion is as displayed on the chart. (Review ground rules as appropriate, such as smoking, drinking coffee/sodas, etc.)	<u>Asst.</u> have charts set up, with chart #1 discussion title.
	b. Although many of you have different MOS's, there is a common goal that applies to <u>all of you</u> , regardless of your particular technical specialty. That goal is to <u>be the most effective leader that you can be</u> to the Marines that will be in your charge. Therefore, the purpose of this discussion is to examine some of the necessary preparations for assuming these responsibilities of leadership in the field.	Emphasize this point.
	c. <u>Key Points for this Period</u>	<u>Asst:</u> display chart #2
	(1) The three elements of leadership.	discussion overview
	(2) Specific ways that each of us may use in broadening and improving those three elements of leadership to prepare ourselves to be an effective Marine Corps leader.	

- d. Training Objectives. The student, upon completion of this period of instruction, and when provided with a list of alternatives will be able to select the one which correctly identifies:
- (1) The three elements of leadership that a Marine leader should have knowledge of when he is analyzing a use able concept of leadership.
- (2) The relationships between the three elements of leadership.
- (3) The most important step which a Marine leader must take to improve his knowledge of the three elements of leadership.
- Asst:flip to chart #3 showing the TO's. Is the asst going to discuss the TO's?

0005 2. DISCUSSION

a. Self

- (1) What do we need to know about ourselves as leaders?

(a) Our strengths & weaknesses.

[1] Ability to communicate with Subordinates and seniors

[2] Our leadership style

[3] Our values

[4] Our traits

[5] Our knowledge of the situation

- (2) Do we need to recognize our strengths and weaknesses? Yes.

- (3) How can we determine our strengths and weaknesses?

Asst:flip to chart #4 showing the factors of leadership.

(a) Self-analysis (can we truly keep this analysis objective?)

(b) Feedback from others

[1] Superiors (only at fitness report time?)

[2] Peers (how do we get this feedback?)

0015    b. Troops

(1) What are some of the things we need to know about the troops?

(a) Background

(b) Experience

(c) Education

(d) Capabilities and limitations

(e) Personal goals

(f) Personality traits -strengths and weaknesses

(g) Morale, spirit, and soul

(2) How do we acquire and continuously improve on this necessary information?

(a) SRB's

(b) Observation

(c) Interviews-initial and periodic

(d) Inspections

(3) Would it be a good idea to keep a written record of this info for ourselves? Why? Where? (Platoon Leader's Notebook)

INTERIM SUMMARY (Briefly summarize main discussion (points.)

0030 c. Situation

(1) What do we need to know about the situation?

(a) Leaders knowledge in the area

(b) Troops knowledge in the area

(c) Degree of urgency required

(d) Leaders attitude and opinion of his troops

(e) Troops attitude and opinion of their  
leader

(2) How do we improve in each of these areas?

0045 3. SUMMARY

a. Three elements of leadership are:

(1) Self

(2) Troops

(3) Situation

b. These three areas are interrelated and dynamic.

c. You must always seek ways to improve your  
knowledge in all three elements of leadership.

#### CLOSING STATEMENT

The preceding discussion indicates that acquiring a knowledge about the three elements of leadership contributes to an understanding of the leadership process, yet, not one of them is sufficient to explain the phenomenon completely. In short, leadership is a dynamic activity wherein the leader always operates in a leader/follower relationship. Followers are not mere automatons carrying out the leader's desires to the best of their abilities. They are human beings with motives and goals of their own, strong attachments to their fellow group members, and attitudes towards their leaders and group's goals that may add or detract from goal accomplishment. The leader must recognize the

existence of these individual and group factors and how they affect his ability to influence his troops.

0050    END DISCUSSION

## APPENDIX C

### DISCUSSION LEADING TECHNIQUES

#### LEADERSHIP DISCUSSION CRITIQUE

(Check the appropriate box for each statement below.)

YES

NO

Classroom facilities were appropriate-  
The discussion started on time-  
Leader established ground rules for the discussion-  
Leader reviewed main points of prior discussion  
period-  
Leader presented an effective introduction to the  
objective(s) of the discussion period-  
Questions were well planned, properly asked,  
and provoked discussion-  
Leader encouraged all members to participate-  
Leader redirected the discussion when it tended  
to get off the topic-  
Leader made interim summaries at appropriate points-  
Leader included divergent viewpoints in summaries as  
appropriate-  
Leader participated directly only to the extent  
necessary for guidance and control and to  
provide expertise not brought out by the group-  
Training aids and supplemental materials were  
appropriate and handled correctly-  
Objectives of the discussion were accomplished-  
Leader made a final summary and (if necessary)  
announced details of the next meeting-  
The discussion closed on time-

DISCUSSION LEADER:

MONITOR:

(Use reverse side for comments)

DATE/TIME:

## APPENDIX D

### Discussion Leading Techniques

#### Discussion Techniques

1. Introduction. This section contains information on how to guide a discussion. The Discussion Leader's function is to lead and guide the discussion not direct it. It is not a "by the numbers" lecture, but a more subtle approach to leadership training. Understanding the discussion group process is a valuable tool which will benefit you throughout your Marine Corps career, whether in a command or staff billet. All of us at one time or another are either a participant or a leader involved in problem solving meetings/discussions, and these discussions are quite similar to the leadership training technique we are discussing here. All are oriented towards an objective or solution, involve group discussion, and have a leader. For example, a company commander may hold a meeting with his/her platoon commanders to discuss how to best approach getting the unit ready for a Commanding General's inspection. During the discussion the platoon commanders will present their ideas and the commander can formulate his plan of action. By using the discussion method the commander can cover in an organized fashion (using an agenda outline) many ideas, problems, and solutions, and ensure his/her subordinate unit leaders are knowledgeable on the subject.

#### 2. The group and the discussion leader.

a. Each member is an individual and brings to class many different factors which influence the initial total group makeup. Each person is influenced by numerous sets of forces which have a bearing on his behavior in the group. Although they are invisible forces they nevertheless manifest themselves throughout the week, some becoming apparent immediately, some hidden behind a thin veil of camouflage, some only being revealed by nonverbal language. Some of the factors found in groups are listed below:

(1) Theories, assumptions, values, beliefs, prejudices, attitudes about self, others, things, groups, organizations, and cultures. These serve as a point of departure for each person's behavior.

(2) Loyalties to other outside reference groups, i.e., his/her family, profession, religion, political affiliation, etc.

(3) A repertoire of behavior skills which permit or prevent him/her from doing what he/she really wants to do (diagnostic skills, listening skills, etc.).



(4) Feelings: sick, sad, depressed, unhappy, angry, frustrated, suspicious, etc.

b. At the beginning of a group learning experience, people know very little about each other. This ambiguous, uncertain atmosphere often creates uneasiness, discomfort and confusion.

c. The burden is upon the discussion leader to eliminate the above negative conditions and create a relaxed atmosphere where trust, acceptance, respect and all the positive things necessary to facilitate group learning and sharing becomes a reality. The discussion leader's personality and technique are of utmost importance in accomplishing that.

d. There is no tool more important than the discussion leader's attitudes; attitude towards others, towards himself/herself, and towards the group as well as individuals in the group, the quality of the relationship with each member of the group is of utmost importance.

e. We should not consider the use of group discussion unless we believe that its effect will in some way be better than a lecture in which he alone contributes to the group. Several additional factors need to be considered in which the discussion leader must believe:

(1) Group members have something to contribute.

For some this contribution may be a new idea; for others, an idea borrowed from someone else; for others, a fact or observation picked up from reading; for still others, an expression of feelings, a report of their experiences, or an evaluation of the discussion. Much of the value is in questions asked. The effective discussion leader considers all of these to be important.

(2) Each individual is unique.

The effective discussion leader understands each person is different from everyone else. Consequently, he/she has the potential for making some unique, fascinating, enlightening, educational, meaningful contributions one that no one else could possibly make because no one else is quite like him/her.

(3) The group exists for the achievement of the members' goals.

(a) The discussion leader sees the group as the vehicle for the achievement of the goals of all its members, including himself/herself and its purpose for being there. "What are the leadership needs of each person?" is a question that must continuously be asked by the good discussion leader.

(b) To hold values such as those mentioned above means the discussion leader needs to feel secure himself/herself. He/she needs to be an experienced leader, to have "been there before" with a wealth of experience, and be able to share and communicate them.

(c) He/she must be secure enough to tolerate others having opinions different from his/her own. In a very real sense, he/she must respect his/her own uniqueness, otherwise how can he respect the uniqueness of others? A strong desire to pattern others in our own image is usually rooted in a deep sense of insecurity, inferiority and powerlessness. The mark of a good leader with considerable inner strength and security lends itself to the willingness for others to be themselves, to have their own thoughts and to see the world as an individual.

f. Among many other things, the discussion leader must also:

(1) Function as an expert and project himself/herself as a person.

(2) Be an outsider who brings in skill and knowledge and at the same time, be an insider who can participate meaningfully.

(3) Work hard to obtain trust from group members.

(4) Understand the private world of others and be able to communicate some of that understanding.

(5) Have a positive, warm, accepting regard (attitude) for others and feel that regard unconditionally.

(6) Realize that the quality of the learning is heavily dependent upon himself/herself. "There are no bad groups, only bad discussion leaders."

(7) Vary his/her roles depending on the group.

(8) Avoid adopting the member role which will prevent him/her from providing guidance demanded by his/her trainer role.

(9) Be aggressive, protective, and supportive at the appropriate time.

(10) Accept feedback openly.

(11) Be alert for mannerisms which may reveal some emotional feeling on the part of a group member, whether silent, animated, or otherwise (e.g., expressions, foot tap pings, etc.).

(12) The discussion leader must also realize the difficulties found in the group process such as:

(a) Members accept the group leader but have low trust in each other due to fear of rejection by peers (but the authority figure is trusted.)

(b) Members have problem with authority figures the discussion leader has not inspired them out of their lethargy.

g. A favorable climate is of tremendous importance for learning since the process of learning is greatly affected by the situation. Confronted with an idea that is at variance with an old idea, a person must reorganize all of the attitudes, values, and concepts that have become intimately related to the old idea. Mark Twain stated that "Education is unlearning that which we have learned,"--not a simple process by any means. To do this a person must feel it is safe for him/her to express those attitudes, values and concepts that he/she will not be criticized or ridiculed if he expresses opposition to the new idea, discusses his doubts or defends the old idea. Thus, there must be an accepting, non-evaluative climate in the learning situation. The earlier this climate is set, the better for all concerned.

h. Many of the techniques listed for good counseling are applicable to good discussion leading; other things to consider are listed below:

(1) Eliminate useless formalities such as raising hands for permission to speak or standing.

(2) Listen to what each has to say.

(3) Set aside your own evaluation of ideas offered. (Have faith in the group.)

(4) Avoid preaching, teaching, or moralizing.

(5) Avoid pushing people into participation before they feel like it.

i. The discussion leader is a resource--if not, there would be no reason for him to be there. This refers to special skills, insights or information he might possess that others do not have. Group members look to the discussion leader as being a resource though it may never be said and is usually a tacit agreement by all concerned.

It is easy, however, to overlook the fact that every group member is also potentially a resource. One of the difficult problems for a discussion leader is to avoid becoming the group's only resource or the "duty expert." Most members are willing to let the leader do the work and to sit back and listen; this is especially true in learning situations; traditionally, teachers teach and students learn. It is often overlooked that teachers can learn from the student (who can teach). This is one of the many advantages of the group discussion; it provides an opportunity for problems to be solved with the resources of many people. Additionally, recognizing contributions from members without going abruptly on to someone else is very important; it has a positive effect and tends to encourage others to "open-up," gives a feeling they are contributing something worthwhile, and usually increases the volume of good discussion.

j. The tendency must be reduced, then, for the group to be solely dependent upon the discussion leader. The principle concern of some traditional leaders is how they can most convincingly present their knowledge so members will learn what they know. Discussion leaders can also become so preoccupied with what they will say and how it will be delivered that they are neglectful of the potential importance of each member and overlook (don't listen) what is said when a member finally does get the opportunity to speak. It takes time and effort to create the conditions whereby group members learn to consider each other as a resource and to draw on this special information and experience that each brings to the group. The biggest contribution to this objective is the discussion leader's attitude:

(1) If he/she does not believe that he always knows best.

(2) If he/she is willing to learn from others.

(3) If he/she does not have a strong need to always be seen by others as the expert.

(4) If he/she sincerely believes others can contribute, then he has a real chance of releasing the group's own resources.

k. The importance of two discussion leaders (primary and assistant) per group is also worthy of note. With two instructors there is added expertise, continuity, objectivity, instructor feedback, and support when needed.

(1) It may take time for the two leaders to effectively work together as a team, but once this is accomplished they can complement each other significantly, and the resulting benefits are well worth the investment. If one discussion leader has difficulty the other can support him/her by providing additional expertise without "turning off" the group or inducing a loss of self-esteem on the part of the primary discussion leader.

(2) The primary discussion leader can get more involved in the group while the assistant observes the primary leader, each member of the group and the entire period of instruction. This is invaluable to the group process and provides excellent feedback to the primary discussion leader.

(3) In case of sickness, emergencies, etc., there should be someone who can take over immediately without an appreciable change in mood or technique. Platform instructors can handle this easily through substitute instructors because it is mostly impersonal, one-way type of instruction. A discussion group is more personal, depends on established support and on student contributions. When a new discussion leader emerges on the scene, much is lost from what has previously happened in the group, the total group process suffers a loss, and they must readjust and he/she come acquainted with the new group member.